

THE THRONE OF THE THOUSAND TERRORS.

BY WILLIAM LE QUEUX.

Author of "Zoraida," "Stolen Souls," etc.

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PART I.

Far south, beyond the Atlas mountains, beyond that great limitless plain known as the Sahara...

On a recent journey from Biskra to Mourouk, in Fezzan, I foolishly disregarded the injunctions of my friend Emile Chandonx...

With bronzed, aquiline features, long gray beard, and keen, deep-set eyes; tall, erect, agile and of commanding presence, he was a splendid specimen of the Arab of the plains...

These days were breathless and blazing. Scorched by the sun, and half-suffocated by the sand-laden wind, our way lay through a wilderness that nature had forsaken...

About five weeks after I had inadvertently thrown in my lot with the Kel-Isabean, and after penetrating a region, that had never been explored by Europeans...

evidently prearranged, joined by a body of 800 horsemen, who armed themselves with the rifles obtained from our camels' packs...

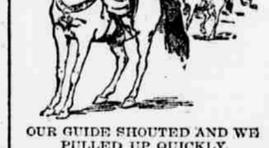
Abdul-Melik shouted an order clear and distinct. Whereupon the horsemen galloped out in two long lines, and with their guns carried across their saddles...

The fusillade was deafening, and for fully half an hour it was kept up. About twenty of our men had been killed or wounded, when suddenly the great line rose with loud shouts as if they were one man...

Half demented by excitement and success, my companions entered the houses, shot down the women with relentless cruelty, tore from them what little jewelry they possessed and plundered, wrecked and burned their homes...

While dawn spread in saffron streaks the work of plunder still proceeded, but when the sun shone forth only the smoke-blacked walls of Thibout remained standing...

At sundown, five days afterwards, we descended into a rocky valley, and suddenly came upon a wonderful mass of scattered ruins, of amazing magnitude and extent...



OUR GUIDE SHOUTED AND WE PULLED UP QUICKLY.

As I rode past me swift as the wind, he heeded them not. I loathed, despised and hated him.

At sundown, five days afterwards, we descended into a rocky valley, and suddenly came upon a wonderful mass of scattered ruins, of amazing magnitude and extent...

by set him at defiance. Then turning his keen eyes upon her, he noted how extremely handsome she was, and while she returned his gaze unflinchingly, her beauty held me in fascination...

"I am called Khadija Fathma, daughter of Ali Ben Ushashami, cad of Ideles," she answered, in a firm, defiant tone.

"All Ben Ushashami!" echoed Abdul-Melik, knitting his brows fiercely. "Thou art his daughter; the daughter of that accursed son of offal who endeavored to betray me into the hands of the Roums?"

"Darest thou insult me, wench?" he cried, pale with passion, and starting up as if to strike her. "Thou art the child of the man who would have given me into the hands of the Spahis for the sake of the two bags of gold offered for my head..."

"Who art thou?" DEMANDED THE DREADED CHIEF ROUGHLY. where thy food will be offal and thou wilt slake thy thirst with boiling pitch. True, I have fallen captive into thine hands, having journeyed to Thibout to see my father's mother, who was dying...

Roughly the men dragged her away, but ere she went she cast at us a look of haughty scornfulness, and, shaking her shoulders, uttered his terrible mandate with ineffable disdain.

"The jade's hands shall be sent to her father, the cad, as a souvenir of the interest he taketh in my welfare," the Sheikh muttered aloud; her tongue will never again utter a rebuke or insult.

Briefly I explained how I had saddled a fleet horse and placed a saddle-bag with food upon it. "If I met safely away I shall owe my life to you, she added, with intense gratitude, pressing my hand for an instant to her quivering lips..."

its possession would always remind me of her and slipped it into the pocket of my gaudouira.



WHEN SUDDENLY THE SPAHIS OF ONE OF THE SPAHIS STRUCK SOMETHING HARD.

ment later, with a whispered "Allah islemeck!" she sped away, with her unbound hair flying behind her, and was instantly lost in the darkness.

"This record I leave for the person into whose hands it may fall, for I am starving. Whoever reads this let him hasten to Zennou, in the Zelaz desert, two days from the well of El Ameina, and from the Habel-Zouk...

Chatteris! Instantly it occurred to me that a celebrated English explorer, the first line rose with loud shouts as if they were one man and, mounting rode straight at their opponents, while we dashed at headlong speed upon our enemies almost ere they had time to realize our intention.

With an escort of twenty Spahis, all well mounted and armed, we rode out in Salak at dawn, and for nine days continued our journey across the desert due eastward, first taking in the caravan route to Tarz Oul, beyond the French boundary, and continuing through the rocky region of the Ibehouen and across the Djedid Oasis, until one evening...

Then, dressed in the haik and burnouse of the Arab of the plain, Chandonx took his seat under the second bastion, his spades concealed beneath our flowing drapery, approached the town and crept under the shadow of the walls until we reached the Bab-el-Oued, or principal gate. Guarded by strong watch towers on either side, the gate was closed, and silently we crept, anxious and breathless, over the sand and westward, until we had counted twenty paces and reached the second bastion.

Then, after glancing eagerly around to reassure ourselves that we were not observed, we all five commenced to dig beneath the wall. Discovery, we knew, would mean death. The sand was loose and full of stones, and for some time we worked without result. Indeed, I began to fear that some one had already been able to decipher the record and obeyed its injunctions, when suddenly the spade of one of the Spahis struck something hard, and he uttered an exclamation of surprise. With a will and within ten minutes we were unearthing an object of extraordinary shape. At first it puzzled us considerably, but at length, when we had cleared the earth sufficiently to remove it, we made a cursory examination and discovered it was a kind of stool with a semi-circular seat, supported by six short columns of twisted gold...

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